some . . coffee I was suddenly . . frightened and . . refused it."

"Very wisely so," the Duke said. "If you had drunk the coffee you would certainly not be here now."

"I . . never . . thought of it being . . drugged!" Luella murmured.

"Then you must be very foolish or very innocent," the Duke said sharply. "Surely you know better than to accept a drink from a stranger in an Italian city, when you look like you do?"

Luella twisted her fingers together. "I . . I know it wa.s.wrong of me . . but he seemed fatherly and . . k.kind . . and I had just . . come from the Cathedral . . where I had gone to . . pray after m.my . . father was . . buried."

She gave a little sob as she added: "I was . . alone and thinking . . how uncomfortable and . . embarrassing it would be to have . . to go to the . . British Embassy . . and say I had . . no money."

"How could you possibly have got yourself into such a situation," the Duke asked, "where you had no money and were alone in a city like Milan?"

"Papa was taken . . seriously ill . . and for ten days lay unconscious. Although I called in the best doctors, they could do . . nothing for him . . but they were . . expensive. Then he . . d.died without . . ever . . speaking to me again!"

There was a pathetic note in her voice and the Duke's voice was kinder as he said: "I can understand your predicament, Miss Hanley, but you should have gone straight to the British Embassy."

"That . . is what I . . intended to do," Luella said,

"and I cannot imagine . . how I was so . . s.stupid as to . . agree to what Signor Vecchio . . suggested."

"I am sure he was very persuasive," the Duke said sarcastically. "He has had a great deal of experience in picking up attractive young women at railway stations, coaching inns, and of course outside the Cathedral."

Luella looked down at her hands. She was thinking that the Duke had every right to rebuke her, just as her father and mother would have done. Once again she could see the strange look in Signor Vecchio's eyes and the smile on his lips when he suggested giving her coffee. She realised now that it was only because they had been interrupted by Father Sebastian that he had changed his mind.

When she thought of it, she remembered how he had spoken to her in a very different tone when he came back into the room. She gave a sudden cry. "I have thought of something!" she said. "Something, Your Grace, which concerns . . you!"

"What is it?" the Duke asked.

She thought he did not sound particularly hopeful and she said: "I think, if I am not mistaken, that when I was in the Cathedral, I saw the priest, whom Signor Vecchio obviously knew, called Father Sebastian, looking at the marriage register that had just been signed by a bride and bridegroom."

The Duke stared at her. "Are you suggesting that he was tearing out the certificate we have here?"

"I am almost sure of it!" Luella said, "I watched him go into the chapel just beside me." She thought for a moment and then went on: "The servers were carrying away the chalice and the wine. He stood for